

Interview with Mr. Royal D. Bisbee , 2011

Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

ROYAL D. BISBEE

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: Mr. Bisbee died on September 12, 2010 prior to completing this interview]

Q: Today is May 17th, 2010. This is an interview with Royal D. Bisbee. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Do you go by Royal?

BISBEE: I go by Roy.

Q: Alright Roy, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

BISBEE: I was born in Godhra, India on February 21st, 1923. Godhra is in Panchmahals, which was in Baroda State. It is still in Baroda State. Nevertheless, it is known as the Panchmahals.

Q: What brought that about?

BISBEE: My parents were American missionaries. My father was a student at Boston University. He became a missionary and went out to India in 1910. My mother followed

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him about one year later in 1911. They were married in Baroda State under the auspices of the Maharaja of Baroda, who gave my parents a state wedding. My father was considered to be one of the advisors to the Maharaja of Baroda. He was considered to be a fairly intellectual fellow, could speak Greek and Latin, and a highly religious man.

Q: Let's talk about the Bisbees. First, where do they come from?

BISBEE: The Bisbees came from Maine originally. They were Maine-iacs. They migrated from Maine to Spokane to minister to the American Indians of Spokane.

Q: Were your father's parents also missionaries?

BISBEE: My grandparents were not missionaries, but they were ministers.

Q: What denomination were they?

BISBEE: They were Methodist Church. They ministered to the American Indians in the Spokane area for all their years.

Q: Was it there where the missionary family was killed? There was a lady who wrote a well-known book, going back to the Oregon Trail.

How did your father go to Boston University?

BISBEE: He went to Boston University after he graduated from Willamette College. He did well. He also worked in the summer months as an itinerant minister for the Methodist Church in the Northwest. He got himself a scholarship at Boston University.

Q: Boston University has a background with the Methodists, doesn't it?

BISBEE: I believe so, but I'm not entirely sure.

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Q: I have a master's degree from Boston University, but things had fuzzed over so much by that time about the religious origins of many schools.

BISBEE: He seemed to feel that they had. As I recall, he talked a good deal about it and was pleased with the reception that he received. Later, he got his Doctor of Divinity degree.

Q: Much later, Martin Luther King graduated from there.

BISBEE: I imagine he did.

Q: What about on your mother's side?

BISBEE: On my mother's side, they were Irish immigrants who came to the United States through Canada. My grandfather was a cabinet maker. He came from Ireland with his box of tools. He did well. He established his own company. He later became a member of the R.H. White Company, and headed up the Department of Furniture, or Furniture and Works, whatever they called it. They did very well. My mother went to what I supposed you would call a finishing school of sorts, because she was trained in music and other things that were akin to good family. My father and mother met at one of the church functions. They agreed to marry, and she followed him out to India one year later.

Q: What brought your father to India?

BISBEE: He felt cold. I have a letter on file to the effect that he was drawn to the prospect of serving others, the importance of serving others, and the necessity to aid and assist others in their development. This is what led him to that, and the acceptance by the church for his service.

Q: Let's talk about the state where your father worked in India. What was it like when he got there?

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BISBEE: Fortunately, the Maharajah at that period of time was a progressive individual. He was very forthcoming for new ideas, thoughts and desires of new things. For instance, he asked my father at one stage to develop a prayer that would be acceptable to all peoples in his state: Muslim, Hindu, etcetera. My father did this and said, tongue in cheek, "Roy, I didn't develop anything new. All I did was translate the Lord's Prayer into the local language, which was very acceptable."

From then on, my father could do most anything. He was asked to do all kinds of things for the Maharajah. In fact, he aided the Maharajah in coming to the United States to attend one of the large evangelical movements that was held in Chicago in about 1934.

Q: Where is the state in India? I am trying to put it on a mental map of India.

BISBEE: The State of Baroda is in the western area of the country, in the area of the country that was most exposed to early progress. Here you have the Indus River coming down into the western area. All the early excavations that gave evidence for the early cultivation of civilization are here. You have to think about the river valleys such as Mesopotamia, the Indus River, and all the rivers that came together in those areas. They were all talking to one another in one form or another, through shipping or...

Q: There's a tremendous amount of shipping in the Indian Ocean.

BISBEE: What one has to visualize is that you had a state such as Baroda that was not isolated. It had its talons into a variety of civilizations. There was a highly developed culture.

Q: Again, you were born in what year?

BISBEE: I was born on February 21st, 1923.

Q: How long were you there?

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BISBEE: On and off, I was there for about 17 years.

Q: Could you talk about your experiences, what you were picking up from your parents, about Gandhi and that Movement. And first of all, what about the British Raj? I don't know whether the Maharajah reached into the state or not, but what about the influence that was there?

BISBEE: First of all, my father wanted us to remember that we were Americans. He was always outspoken, saying, "Remember son, we are American. We do not involve ourselves with local affairs. We may be sympathetic and very attuned to our democratic values, but we are American. We respect the local values, the activities that are taking place, the Gandhi movement, the activities of Nehru, and the needs of the British."

Q: This is all very nice, but there had to be a certain point where you or your family saw either the injustices, the rationale, or something. Did you come away from there with any particular feeling for the colonial world?

BISBEE: You are asking me a question about the injustices of the British Raj. I cannot say that I saw, as a youngster, injustices of the British Raj. What I did see was law and order, the fact that the Indians respected the law and order as they saw it, and they respected it more when the British left. They were asking that the British stay on longer. That wasn't possible to do because of the needs of the times, the political developments, and splitting the country into two parts.

My family was friends of the Nehrus and Gandhi.

Q: Where did you go to school?

BISBEE: I went to school at Woodstock in Mussoorie, the Quadrangle.

Q: Was this a Methodist school?

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BISBEE: This was a school that was founded during the days of the East India Company. Other schools were later incorporated into the Quadrangle.

Q: This school is located in Mussoorie, you say?

BISBEE: It is in Mussoorie, which is located at approximately 5,000 feet in the Mani Mountains.

Q: Did the student body consist of just foreign children? Were there students from the Indian ruling class?

BISBEE: At the time I was there, it consisted of children of American missionaries and included children of leading Indians. For instance, Chandrlekha Pandit was in my class, the daughter of Mrs. Pandit.

Q: This was Nehru's sister.

BISBEE: Nevertheless, I knew all these people.

Q: Did the political turmoil penetrate to the school?

BISBEE: No, it did not, and it did not involve itself into that kind of turmoil.

Q: Were you able to get vacation time where you could go out on a bike into the village or the countryside?

BISBEE: Oh yes. I was with my father on his tours into the villages. That was how I learned my languages. I can tell you right now that there isn't another person in the U.S. Government who speaks it as well as I do.

Q: How many languages were you learning?

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BISBEE: I learned Gujarati, which was my first language. I grew up speaking it. My father encouraged me to learn it. In fact, he often said what a wonderful creature I would make in Gujarati. Then I went on and learned Hindi and, later, Urdu. I was able to translate for Presidents Johnson and Eisenhower.

Q: Aside from your father, did you get any Americanization influence?

BISBEE: How do you mean?

Q: I was wondering whether you were sent to the States from time to time.

BISBEE: No, I was not. We would come home when we had the money. Five years is probably the earliest time we would come home. In one period, we didn't have the money to come home.

Q: Of course, we are talking about the time of the Great Depression.

BISBEE: That's right.

Q: Were you attracted towards missionary life as a kid?

BISBEE: Not particularly. I was more attracted to things which I was able to read and learn. For instance, my father would periodically have to go to Bombay. He would take me as a youngster. Bombay was a big city.

Q: Was that the closest big city?

BISBEE: It was the closest really big city. It was the commercial hub of the western part of the country.

My father would take me, because he wanted the company I guess. He and I would go and stop in front of the American Consulate General. He would point out the flag with the

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stars and strips, telling me the reasons for them. He would then go upstairs and closet himself with the Consul General, to talk about things up country, as a good American should do. I would be relegated to talking with the Indian staff in the back. They would all be hilarious with this little American boy, speaking in their language. John J. Macdonald interested me in the Foreign Service, and I have never forgotten that.

Q: When you were home, was there the equivalent of a gang or a bunch of boys that you played with?

BISBEE: When I was back home, I would play with the youngsters in the compound. That helped me learn the language. My father encouraged me to translate for a number of his sermons.

Q: By the time you reached college age, where were you pointed towards?

BISBEE: I was already focused on the Foreign Service. I had wanted to go to Tufts, but I couldn't make it to Tufts because of the shipping accommodation at the time. I was a whole month late because I had to go around South Africa and up through Trinidad. So I went up to my grandparents' area. I talked to the people at the University of Washington. I told them who I was, that I was an in-state student. They looked at my record and found that I didn't have all the credits necessary. I could enter the university as a special student, which I did. From then on, I went ahead with my scholastic work for the Foreign Service.

Q: Back in India, were you much of a reader?

BISBEE: Yes, I was.

Q: Where did you get your books from?

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BISBEE: They were second-hand books that came from the Methodist Church in Spokane. They were books that nobody seemed to want. I used to read every one of them. That was the way it was.

Q: I think I've been through a similar procedure with military libraries. Sometimes when you're left with a very small collection of books and it's an eclectic collection, you pick up a lot more information than you would if you had a massive library.

BISBEE: I think I picked up more background and information about Girls of the Limberlost and the like.

Q: Freckles, and all those books.

BISBEE: Yes, I had an older sister. People were inclined to want to send books for her. Zane Grey was there too.

Q: Those were the potboilers.

BISBEE: Absolutely.

Q: They were good reads. I hope you got books written by Edgar Rice Burroughs too.

BISBEE: Absolutely.

Q: What year did you start at Washington University?

BISBEE: I started when I was 17 years old, in about 1942.

Q: We had a little think going on at the time called World War Two.

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BISBEE: That's right. I recall that very distinctly. I had already entered the university in 1941. When the news came, I put on my ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) uniform, and I was ready to go.

Q: So what happened? When did you go into the military?

BISBEE: I went into the military in 1942, with my parents' permission.

Q: Where did you end up?

BISBEE: I ended up in intelligence in Baghdad. That's where I met this young lady.

Archie Roosevelt and I were team. We covered all of Iraq, from Mosul all the way down to Basra and over to Abadan.

Q: Was this Kim Roosevelt?

BISBEE: No, this was Archie. He wrote a lousy book, I'm sorry to say.

Q: Let's talk about this. When were you in Baghdad?

BISBEE: I was there from 1945 to 1946.

Q: What were you doing?

BISBEE: My job covered several things. I was in charge of their motor pool. There's nothing wrong with that. I was also in charge of being able to speak locally when Archie Roosevelt could not make people understand his classic Arabic.

Q: Had you picked up Arabic by then?

BISBEE: Yes, I learned it there. I also went over to the Indian military and took an examination in Gujarati, and got two years of academic study credits.

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Q: Did the British in Iraq use mainly Indian troops?

BISBEE: Yes they did.

Q: Was the revolt earlier?

BISBEE: Yes it was. Loy Henderson had just taken off. James Moose had also gone at the time. Loy Henderson remembered me when he arrived in Bombay later. He said, "You were in Baghdad."

I replied, "Yes, sir."

He said, "I'll see you later."

That's all I know. Eight months later, I was up in New Delhi acting as his bag man, as it were.

Q: Let's go back to Baghdad. While you were there, what was going on there?

BISBEE: There were two things going on. One was the local Iraqis wanted to feel their oats. They felt suppressed under the British. They didn't feel that they were receiving their due recognition. The tribes in the western part of the country were not at all happy or satisfied with their particular lot. There were many aspects to it. The British, on the other hand, had what they called political advisors. We were constantly in touch with the political advisors, who informed us what was allegedly going on in the area. We did not entirely take their advice regarding the situation. We felt there was more to the problem because of the Shias, the Sunnis, and the Kurds up in the north.

Q: Things that we are learning first-hand now.

BISBEE: This is not new stuff; this is old stuff. I find it very discouraging, because it's not necessary.

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Q: What was Archie Roosevelt doing? Didn't he later make quite a name for himself in Iran?

BISBEE: Archie Roosevelt came back and married an Eastern Mediterranean lady, who later became Chief of Protocol.

Q: I've interviewed Selwa Roosevelt.

BISBEE: That's right. Archie did not really amount to what he wished to be. He wished to be an ambassador, but he never made it. Somehow, he didn't hit the right notes. He later simply became a member of Citibank. He later died. I don't know the cause.

Q: With your language, being American and not being tied to the British, how did you find the attitude of the Indian military?

BISBEE: The Indian military were very friendly to me. I can suggest to you, [phrase in Indian/Gujarati?], you and we are of one country. I could just about do anything for the embassy. As a matter of fact, I was asked to do almost anything for the embassy. Henderson would ask me to do all kinds of things for the embassy, him.

Q: How was Mrs. Henderson when you were there?

[laughter]

BISBEE: Are you being facetious?

Q: No. I think of the stories that supposedly when he was Ambassador to India, sitting in the grand dining hall, which was very opulent, and she was very carefully scrubbing all her utensils with her napkin saying something like, "You can never tell in places like this."

BISBEE: Elise Henderson was a very sensitive and kindly woman. She was very intolerant of what she would call abuse. She couldn't stand or accept any type of slight. Does that

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mean that she was intolerant? Yes, she was intolerant as all hell. Was she intolerant towards me? No, because she needed me to deal with the servants and day-to-day aspects of the operation of her establishment. She couldn't seem to be able to keep servants in line, or order things from the bazaar. She would order things and then Henderson would say, "Roy, please take this back. I cannot have this. I cannot pay for this. I have no way to deal with this."

It is strange that you should ask that. No one else has ever asked me.

Q: In my interviews, there are two sort of Foreign Service dragons, if you will, difficult people: Mrs. Henderson and Wahwee Macarthur, the wife of Douglas MacArthur II. I've interviewed Douglas MacArthur. These were two legends in the Foreign Service.

BISBEE: To be perfectly frank about Elise, she was the first one to come to the Hindu Rao Hospital in New Delhi where my second daughter was born in 1950. She brought a bottle of wine, asked how things were going, and if everything was okay. She said, "Take your time. Don't come to the embassy until you're prepared."

She was considerate, but that didn't mean she wasn't one hell on wheels. She was not averse to going into a person's home and saying, "I want this piece and that piece of furniture in my house. I am asking Roy Bisbee to have it transferred this afternoon."

And by god, I did it.

Q: We'll come to that. First, let's move back to Baghdad.

Was there any aftermath of the rebellion going on?

BISBEE: Although we never felt it, I can assure you there was. It was quiet, but it was there. Most Americans would not have felt it. I knew it and I reported it to my colonel.

Q: I'm just looking at some pictures here.

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BISBEE: The intelligence people are all together in one.

Q: With the intelligence, what sort of things were you concerned about?

BISBEE: At the time, we were concerned largely about the transfer of military equipment from Khorramshahr up through to the Northeast, through Iran and into the Soviet Union.

Q: Was this a supply line?

BISBEE: Exactly, a supply line. We were primarily concerned that none of the equipment get diverted. The equipment could be easily diverted through the tribal movements. If you know Iran and if you know Baghdad at the time, you know of the Baluchi tribe of Southern Iran, who could easily move equipment without you knowing it.

Q: This was the sort of place where locomotives would disappear.

BISBEE: That's right. That was our main concern.

Q: Nobody was making moves to move you over to the CBI, China-Burma-India?

BISBEE: Yes, I had applied for that. That's where I wanted to go. In fact, I volunteered to go right from the very beginning. The record should show that Royal D. Bisbee volunteered for the CBI Theater, because of my languages, and for whatever activity. However, I'm glad I did not, because I met my wife in Baghdad.

Q: Who is sitting in on this interview.

BISBEE: Immediately after the war I was fortunate that when I got my degree, the Department of State, which for whatever reason had my name, gave me my Foreign Service commission as Vice Consul to Bombay. We arrived there on January 7th.

Q: Did you get married in Baghdad?

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BISBEE: We did.

Q: Would you explain your wife's background.

BISBEE: My wife came out about a year after I did. I said to myself that this was probably the best thing that ever happened to me. She was in the Foreign Service. I was interested in the Foreign Service. It looked as though this was made to order. We decided that we were made for this purpose and we applied for it. She had to apply as a bride of an American soldier being married overseas. She had to understand that this in no way would make her an American citizen or give her special privileges. She had to make sure that she had proper letters, references, and so forth, to make sure she was a person of proper order.

Q: Oh yes.

Some years after the war, I was Vice Consul in Frankfurt. I would interview young ladies about their source of income, and all that. You used to have to get special waivers, because this was where GIs and young ladies met.

From your viewpoint, did our embassy seem to have much interest in what was going on in Baghdad?

BISBEE: I have to say that it did not. The Rashid Rebellion had just ended. The main interest in that was over with, so there was a hiatus there. Henderson and Moose had left to come back to Washington on consultations. I never felt that there was a dynamic in place there. Nevertheless, we seemed to function in good order. We had people like my colonel and Armin Meyer.

Q: What was Armin Meyer at the time?

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BISBEE: Armin Meyer was part of OSS (Office of Strategic Services). I don't know what happened to him.

Q: Eventually, he was Ambassador to Japan. He was also Ambassador to Lebanon. He had quite a distinguished career.

MRS. BISBEE: He was Loy's best man.

Q: He's been interviewed.

BISBEE: He has? Good.

Some of the other officers there included Westmoreland, Robert Meminger, and Moffat. I don't know if any of those names mean anything to you.

Q: Were the Hashmites the rulers then or not?

BISBEE: Yes.

Q: Was it Faisal?

BISBEE: It was King Faisal, the six year-old boy.

Q: He wasn't deposed until 1958, I guess.

MRS. BISBEE: He wasn't deposed. He was shot.

Q: Was it pretty much British rule there?

BISBEE: It was British rule, very much so with British advisors and so on.

Q: When did you leave there?

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BISBEE: I left there in 1947.

Q: Where did you go from there?

BISBEE: I went to India.

Q: Was this a direct movement from the military to being a Second Secretary?

BISBEE: No. From Baghdad, Barbara and I went to India to see my parents. From there, we came back to the United States. I went to the University of Washington and completed the year of study I had left and got my degree.

Q: In what field?

BISBEE: My field was international studies. I got my degree and got a letter from the Department of State. In fact, two places asked for me. The CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) was starting up at that time. Archie Roosevelt was fiddling around with the CIA, suggesting that I come. However, I got a letter from the Department of State, which I preferred.

Q: Had you taken any sort of exam before?

BISBEE: I took the written Foreign Service Exam.

Q: Was that the three and a half day exam?

BISBEE: I don't think it was three and a half day exam. I know it had French in it, and a number of other aspects.

Q: Was there an oral exam?

BISBEE: No, there was no oral exam.

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Q: So you came in 1947?

MRS. BISBEE: It was in 1946. You went to the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) for a couple of months before.

BISBEE: I didn't understand the question. Would you ask the question again please?

Q: When did you come into the Foreign Service?

BISBEE: I came into the Foreign Service in December 1946.

Q: What was the procedure then?

BISBEE: The procedure at that time was a letter which said you are requested to join the Foreign Service, listing the time and place to report, and where your hotel accommodations were.

I immediately accepted and reported in to the Foreign Service Institute.

Q: Where was the Foreign Service Institute located?

BISBEE: It was in the building just to the left and near the old Department of State.

Q: Was it in an apartment building?

BISBEE: It seems to me it was in the old Navy Building.

Q: It may well have been.

Were you in the equivalent to a class?

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BISBEE: I was in a class. We studied consular affairs. That's about the best I can describe. We studied about all kinds of consular affairs: seamen and shipping. We discussed matters related to visas, and so forth?

Q: How many were in your class?

BISBEE: There were about 12 of us.

Q: Do you recall any of them, who they were?

BISBEE: Maurice Dembo was one. I can't remember other names right now.

Q: Don't worry about that.

Was anybody in personnel saying okay, you've got these languages? You're off to India.

BISBEE: There was no discussion. It was just assumed I was going. It was as though someone had already asked for me. I have a sneaking suspicion that the person who asked for me was Howard Donovan. He was Consul of Embassy in New Delhi, and he knew my parents. My father said he asked that I be sent as language and consular officer.

Q: When did you arrive in New Delhi?

BISBEE: I arrived in Bombay first, in 1948.

MRS. BISBEE: It was January 7th, 1947.

Q: Was this during or after the split, partition?

BISBEE: I arrived during the whole process of the split. I had the whole business of the docks thrown at me. I had to sort out all of the embassy's shipping and seamen aspects of this whole thing. It was a nightmare, because you had materials being shipped from

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Karachi being transferred to Bombay, and materials being shipped back up to Karachi. It was a mess.

Q: I assume you had local employees who were having to split too, weren't they?

BISBEE: Not necessarily the ones in Bombay; they were pretty solid. The ones in the north had more of a problem.

MRS. BISBEE: His parents were in Delhi at the time.

Q: What was the Consulate General like?

BISBEE: There was a general manager, John J. Macdonald, a very fine gentleman. He was a good executive. Without his executive skills, I can assure you that place would not have operated well. You had a number of other staff members who, in my opinion, were not worth a damn. They were more interested in careers that were not possible there at that time. Nevertheless, we were able to operate, because I was immediately thrown into doing visas, the seamen and shipping aspects. I was too worried about how I was going to proceed and learning about the job at the same time, rather than worrying what my career was going to be.

Q: Talk a little about seamen and shipping. This was an era when there were still American seamen.

BISBEE: Very much so.

Q: In later years, they've sort of disappeared. There used to be what they used to call the China Coast. What about the Indian Coast? These were pretty much people who, I won't say the dregs of sailorhood, but they weren't the greatest. They hung around and lived off the ports where they could live quite cheaply. There were girls and booze. They would get

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on a ship reluctantly when they had to pick up a little money to keep going. Was that the atmosphere?

BISBEE: Very much so. It was in a way a period which was volatile. You never knew whether the seamen that were in transit in nature were actually what they were pretending to be, or whether they were somehow associated with some kind of organization that was out in some fashion to divert goods and services.

As a matter of fact, my first promotion was due to my being able to find 12 cases of Scotch whisky that had not been breached in some fashion for the embassy in New Delhi, for which they were very pleased.

Q: We are talking about the immediate post-war period. Life was quite different then. You had diversions from the supply line to the Red Ball Express in France and everywhere. It was pretty freewheeling.

BISBEE: It was not only freewheeling, but people thought they could do anything they wanted to do. It was just not possible. It was just like this Miss Cox, for instance. She came to the coast of India on a ship from Nairobi. She just thought she could get off the ship, come ashore, and go do anything she wanted to. She couldn't. It was not possible to do that, certainly not without her passport and other documents. So what happened was she landed in jail.

Q: When was this? This was quite an important episode in a much later time.

BISBEE: This was in 1948.

Q: So this is early on in your career?

BISBEE: Yes.

Q: What was her first name?

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BISBEE: Her full name was Una Chapman Cox.

Q: How did she come to your attention?

BISBEE: She was incarcerated, in jail. I was called by the locals. "Saab, come quickly. The police have one lady in jail and she has to be taken care of. Come quickly."

As soon as I found out what the evidence was in terms of who she was and why she was there, I went and talked with the Consul General. He said, "Do what you can. Get her out."

That's exactly what we did. What I did was to take my local right-hand man and go and interview her to find out what ship she had come from, and to send word back by the local agent to get her documents and papers, get them validated locally, and get her out of jail. The Consul General put her up and got her off to New Delhi and points east.

Q: How old was she?

BISBEE: I really don't know that.

Q: Was she a young girl?

BISBEE: No, I think she was in her late 20s.

Q: I'm surprised the authorities would make a fuss about this.

BISBEE: They didn't really. I smoothed it out as much as possible.

Q: I'm surprised it went as far as her being arrested.

BISBEE: They didn't know who she was or what she was doing there.

Q: So as far as they were concerned, was she a free floating spirit?

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BISBEE: That's right. They didn't know what the hell she was up to.

The captain of the ship was of no account. He was a drunk.

Q: How did she react?

BISBEE: She was very pleased. She was a person who was interested in what was going on. That was the reason why she had come ashore, because she was interested in what was transpiring. Who was to know that later on she was going to be...

Q: You might explain the reason why we are dwelling on this. The Una Chapman Cox Foundation has been a significant factor in the Foreign Service. Many years later, she set up the foundation to help things dealing with the Foreign Service.

BISBEE: She was instrumental in donating large amounts of money to aid and further the ability of Foreign Service Officers to broaden their horizons and academic activities, without which they would not have had the opportunity to accomplish. It has been a very fine opportunity for...

Q: You had no idea this was in the offing?

BISBEE: No, I had no idea who she was or what she was until a couple of years ago when I was informed.

Q: Let's talk a bit about Bombay. Was Bombay at all affected by the partition? Or was that over the horizon?

BISBEE: Bombay was not affected by partition in the sense that you had sections of this and sections of that. Yes, you do have and always will have in places like India sections of the city that are very demarcated as Muslim or as Hindu. But to say that Bombay is one religious aspect or another would be incorrect. Bombay is a very commercial and

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cosmopolitan city. That's the way that it will always be. The same holds for Calcutta, which is very cosmopolitan.

Q: Had Bollywood made a foothold in Bombay at the time?

BISBEE: Not at that time. It didn't exist.

Q: Did you get involved with visas?

BISBEE: Yes, I was doing that.

Q: Was there much in the way of movement towards the United States? We had a quota of maybe 100 a year for immigrants. For non-immigrant visas, was there much going on?

BISBEE: Not at the time. It was more in the nature of people wanting to go to Great Britain. I did not have that kind of problem, although there were interested people wanting to send their children to the United States for studies. There was not a significant number.

Q: Were there any social unrest or political movements going on in the area that concerned us? The Cold War was getting its start, and you had a little farther south the communist area. Were those things going on?

BISBEE: The movements were. In 1947, you had communist movements going on in what was known as Kerala. Nehru was attempting to deal with that. There were separatist movements going on in Eastern India, but there were not separatist activities in Bombay.

MRS. BISBEE: There was mass slaughter, while Muslims were trying to get to Pakistan, and Hindus were trying to get to India.

BISBEE: I'm trying not to deal with that entirely.

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It had to do with money, with wages, and the differences between the people who were members of a scheduled caste and those of a non-scheduled caste.

Q: I'm not familiar with the terms. Does scheduled caste mean the Brahmins?

BISBEE: Yes.

Q: And then moving to the Untouchables?

BISBEE: There were Sudras and others. There were caste differences.

Q: What was the team like at the consulate general?

BISBEE: I found the team fractured. The Consul General was almost by himself. I did not find him to be the leader of a team, but almost by himself.

MRS. BISBEE: Macdonald was replaced by Charles O. Thompson, who was very controversial. His second-in-command thought he should have been elevated.

BISBEE: There were about three or four others in the consulate general who, in my opinion, were all acting on their own and not acting as a team. Quite frankly, I was quite pleased to be transferred to New Delhi.

Q: I think this is probably a good place to stop. The next time, we'll pick up when you are off to New Delhi in 1948.

How was living in Bombay?

BISBEE: We were youngsters and as far as we were concerned, we were perfectly fine. We did not have any problems. There were just the two of us and one child. We had a nice apartment with free servants. We thought we were doing pretty well.

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Q: Very good. We'll pick this up in 1948 when you are off to New Delhi.

Today is May 26th, 2010. This is the second interview with Royal Bisbee.

In 1948, you were rather happy to get out of Iraq and go to New Delhi.

BISBEE: Let's amend that. I was pleased to be able to serve my country and to be able to go on and get my degree at the University of Washington. For that purpose, yes, I was pleased. I also introduced my new wife to my family in Bombay and to see to the birth of my new child.

Q: How did you meet your wife?

BISBEE: I met my wife in Baghdad. It was not a dramatic experience. We were joyfully united. She was a visa officer. In those days, they deigned to send women to do visa work, because they couldn't find men since the men were in the army. We poor young fellows were without the joyful experience of intelligent young ladies.

Q: In 1948, you went to New Delhi.

BISBEE: In 1948, I went to New Delhi.

Q: What was your job?

BISBEE: My job was two-fold. One was to serve with due diligence my ambassador, Loy Henderson. He asked me to do all kinds of services. He knew that I had considerable experience, both educationally as well as linguistically. Secondly, he asked me to do general services work. General services work is, as we all know, whatever you want to call it.

Q: It's the glue that makes the embassy run.

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BISBEE: You're exactly right.

MRS. BISBEE: It's a great place to use a person with languages.

Q: Before we get to your work, 1948 rings loud and clear in India. What was happening from the perspective of the embassy then? How were things going?

BISBEE: The embassy itself was being reorganized. It was being rethought because they had no idea that there would be such tumult in the country. Nehru was a new factor to them. In many respects, Nehru himself was a new intellectual. They had to revamp their thinking. They suddenly recognized that India was going to need many things in the way of reorganization, administration, food, and more understanding. There were going to be two countries, not just one. Suddenly, there were two countries. And here they were, unprepared.

The British had not prepared them for two countries, and the British were certainly not prepared for this whole aspect.

Q: We had become used to dealing with the British, as the rulers of the country. All of a sudden, we are having to deal with the Congress Party. This can be very difficult. Sometimes our officers get more anglophile than the British themselves.

BISBEE: I think that some possibly were. Others were not. Henderson was not. He was more of a Middle Eastphile.

Q: And also Eastern Europe.

BISBEE: Correct.

Q: Was his wife from Estonia?

BISBEE: Yes.

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He was not, but that was probably the hardest wrench for him in many respects. I think this is where he ran into heavy weather in Congress. As a result, he was eventually replaced.

Q: What was the problem with Congress?

BISBEE: I think Congress suddenly realized that they were going to have to come up with a great deal of largesse. They were very much taken with our friend, Mr. Nehru, and his ability to persuade. Suddenly, there he was on the scene. They wanted to keep him on our side, as it were. There were many who also thought at the time that he was very much left wing.

Q: He was. He was a London School of Economics standard bearer.

BISBEE: And he had Mr. Menon.

Q: When I was much younger, I remember Krishna Menon as the evil presence.

BISBEE: As I saw it and as I advised Howard Donovan, this man was a menace to the joint development of an alliance of a strong nature on the subcontinent. And in my opinion he destroyed the intelligence services of the Pakistan-India compact that was developing at the time. He was a real son of a bitch.

Q: You were obviously a very junior officer, but because of your language ability, were you able to sit in on meetings with Henderson and Nehru.

BISBEE: I didn't sit in on meeting with Henderson, but I did with Howard Donovan who was the Deputy Chief of Mission. I had to be extremely careful. As you suggested, I was an extremely junior officer. As I told Howard Donovan, I was not in any way to push myself forward.

Q: One of the things I find interesting about these oral histories, when I talk to people who were officers, they were often the flies on the wall. While the great people were meeting,

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there is a Royal Bisbee sitting off in the corner taking notes or something. Were you picking up from the Nehru entourage and the American Henderson entourage a certain antipathy? Nehru had very little regard for the United States.

BISBEE: No, he had a great deal of regard for the United States, but he did not have much regard for Henderson.

Q: *Why?*

BISBEE: I think because he thought Henderson was shallow. Mrs. Henderson did not help.

Q: *From what I gather and I may be putting words in your mouth, I was told she had the racial traits of the petty aristocracies...*

BISBEE: He felt that Henderson was arrogant. That didn't mean that he wasn't arrogant.

I probably knew Nehru very well for a number of reasons. One was the fact that I had been to his home in Surrey, where his daughters went to school. His daughter, Chandralekha Pandit, was in my class, and we were good friends. I had been to their home in New Delhi on several occasions. As a matter of fact, Henderson didn't know that, but Donovan did. Donovan requested me to keep him informed of any new developments.

Henderson went to Nehru and said, "I want to send a party to rescue Lowell Thomas."

Nehru said, "Oh fine. How is the party going to be comprised?"

Henderson said, "I'm going to send an embassy officer and a nurse. In addition, I would request that the Government of India send a comparable party of a doctor and a nurse."

Nehru, in his usual shrewd way, said, "And who is this officer that you are going to send?"

He said, "I'm going to send Royal Bisbee."

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When he came back to the embassy, Henderson called me into his office and said, "Mr. Nehru has approved of you leading the party. And by the way, Bisbee, I was not aware that Nehru knew you."

"I see, sir. I hope I have been useful."

That was all that was said.

Q: What was this party, the group you went with?

BISBEE: I think it was a birthday party. You always tried to keep things on as low a key as possible, not make it something official.

Incidentally, that's in my book.

Q: Did the embassy sort of divide up into parties? Sort of pro-Indian government and won't say anti-Indian government. This was not easy. From what I gather, the Indians have never been an easy people to deal with. They tend to preach and we tend to preach. Two sets of preachers don't make for a very good combination.

BISBEE: You are asking a question which is extremely difficult to respond to. Perhaps I can put it this way.

There are those who sought to make themselves useful to the Indian government by perhaps acting as favorites. They hoped therefore to be useful to their own embassy. That doesn't always make for success. I think many of them fell short of that. There were other people, like Andrew Cory who was very useful. I believe he was able to play a very good part in the general dynamics of the policy within the embassy. There were others whoswho was the lady who was assigned for social welfare work in India? Somebody in Washington though this was a marvelous thing to do because of the activities of women on the Indian

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scene. Somebody like a social welfare person assigned to show what wonderful works we do. The name was Hersey.

MRS. BISBEE: She was a relative of John Hersey, the writer who wrote Hiroshima and A Bell for Adano.

BISBEE: She provided nothing.

MRS. BISBEE: The Labor Attach#...

BISBEE: That's another kettle of fish. You could argue that why assign a Labor Attach# to India? There is nothing you could add to the labor scene in India by a Labor Attach# from the United States. They were at right angles to each other.

Q: It may have been somewhat of a reflection of what happened in London. When the Labour Government came in in 1945, we had practically no one who knew the Labour Party people, except for the Labor Attach#. I think there was a boosting of Labor Attach#s around the world because you better have somebody who knew something about this.

BISBEE: What is the point of a Labor Attach# in India who cannot speak the language of the labor people? He used to ask me how was this particular labor movement organized? How did this man arrive at this particular position? He was a perfectly fine man. I liked Sokoloff. He was welcomed by the Russians at their festivities. But what use was this?

Q: Where do you find somebody who comes out of the labor movement in the United States who would know about Indian migration? We had a quota of 100. Other countries sent people off to Argentina for instance. They spoke Spanish because they were of Spanish heritage and they were union members. I'm not excusing this...

BISBEE: I know what you are saying.

MRS. BISBEE: You don't mean to say people have to have the language.

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BISBEE: No, I don't.

Q: Obviously, we don't make much headway in situation like that, but there it is.

What was your impression of the Indian bureaucracy, which was well trained?

BISBEE: The ICS, the Indian Civil Service.

Q: Were they an effective organization under the new regime.

BISBEE: They were very effective. From stem to stern, the Indian Civil Service was one of the finest organizations then and now, and has been the glue of the country that has held it together. It is going to need that glue. Otherwise, that country is going to shatter.

Q: Was there the feeling at the time that you had this country - I'm sure you called it a state - with rulers scattered about, that it would not shatter?

BISBEE: At the time, no. Most of us recognized at the time that it was the Indian Civil Service that was going to hold the country together and was holding it together. Nehru himself recognized it. He relied on the Indian Civil Service to hold the states together, and to hold the central government together. When in the face of communist problems in Kerala and other areas of the country, it was the Indian Civil Service on whom he relied to hold it together. He didn't rely on anybody else.

Q: Remembering that you were way down in the embassy, but again you were a fly on the wall. Were we concerned about Kerala, where the Communist Party was very strong?

BISBEE: The Communist Party was strong in the eastern, southwest, and central part of the country. And it is today. Don't let anybody tell you it is not.

Q: Today nobody gives a damn, but in those days, from the American point of view...

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Given your language and your contacts, were you able to break loose from the embassy social set? Did you get out and around?

BISBEE: I was out all the time. I was not a member of the social set. I didn't live at the Taj Mahal. I lived separately in a portion of my parents' home in Old Delhi. I had little or not contact with the social aspects. All my social contacts, whether with the Indian Civil Service or others, came and visited me. For instance, John Law visited me after our sojourn together up in Tibet. I was a part of it, yet I wasn't.

Q: What was your impression of the Indian society you were dealing with? How were they dealing with this partition? It was the very early days.

BISBEE: They were dealing with it as best they could. I was living in an area where shots were being fired right across our living areas. Let's put it this way: they were dealing with it in a quiet subduedness. That's the best way I can tell you. There wasn't any other way for them to deal with it. The police weren't much good. They were a bunch of flunkies, as far as that went. Everybody was concerned about their own existence, and how best to survive, where to go and what to do.

Q: How long were you in this posting?

BISBEE: Do you mean the total Indian posting?

Q: No, just when you went to New Delhi in 1948?

BISBEE: I was there until the first period of 1950.

Q: So the Korean War hadn't broken out when you left?

BISBEE: No, the Korean War hadn't broken out. I was asked to join, but I was already a vice consul, and I decided I was going to remain a vice consul.

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Q: When you left in 1950, where did you go?

BISBEE: In 1950, I was assigned to Washington, although Washington is not the right word for it. What I was assigned to was the University of Pennsylvania.

Q: Doing what?

BISBEE: At the University of Pennsylvania, I was assigned to language training.

Q: What language?

BISBEE: Hindi.

Q: Good heavens. How much Hindi did you need?

BISBEE: I didn't need any more. I finally had to tell Washington this was a waste of everyone's time. I'm not getting anywhere. I'm not doing you justice. I need an assignment. Isn't there something in the wings? There was. What was in the wings was the Voice of America

They asked me to start up the Voice of America broadcast to South Asia. Wonderful. I was able to recruit, monitor, and tailor the programs directly to the South Asia area in Hindi and Urdu.

Q: How long were you doing this?

BISBEE: Unfortunately, I did it only for about eight months.

Q: This was until when?

BISBEE: Until the beginning of 1952. Then I was assigned to go to India to open up the posting in Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh.

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Q: What was the situation? I think of the siege of Lucknow and the Indian Mutiny. I assume we got involved in observing what was going on there.

BISBEE: You've got to understand that there is a saying in India that how Uttar Pradesh goes politically, so goes the country. Just as in the adage of the Middle East, the way that the Pushtunstan area goes, so goes Afghanistan. People better not forget it, because that is the politically controllable area.

I'm sorry. I digress, but what I'm trying to get across is that there are two areas of the world which are very important. One is where we are now, and where we went into Lucknow. It was to Lucknow that I was sent.

Uttar Pradesh was the home of Nehru. Uttar Pradesh is the capital.

We were asked to open up a post at Lucknow. I arrived there with my family in December. Chester Bowles arrived about the same time. He was very generous in that I was not versed in the politics of the time, although I had gotten to know the governor who was a Gujarati. He and I became very good friends. He encouraged me in my Gujarati language. He got a big kick out of Bowles when he first arrived.

I'll tell you this story because it is anecdotal. When Bowles arrived, I had to make arrangements for luncheons, dinners, and for the ladies to see various sights in the area. It's a very historic area. The dining table was beautifully set up. The cards on the table were beautifully engraved. Except for one thing: the name was spelled Bowels.

Q: I'm sure it wasn't the first time it happened.

BISBEE: No, I'm sure. I had to ask, "Why did you do that?"

He said, "I didn't mean to do that Roy. Why would I do that?"

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I said, "I think you might have done that simply to have a good laugh."

I held meetings for Bowles. He wanted to know whether or not there had been any individuals who had gone to Everest. He was on his way to send his credentials to Nepal. I told him not to my knowledge, but the time would come, I was sure. It did, and I put it into my book.

Q: What was your impression of Bowles as ambassador? He was a major figure in the advertising world, which was a very important world in that era.

BISBEE: He was a mess. He was coming to a country where the ambassador was looked upon as someone who was well turned out and well featured. When he arrived, he was - what shall I say? - dressed down?

Q: Unkempt?

BISBEE: Unkempt is the right word. What is the matter with people? Don't they recognize what we as a country are? How we should be showing ourselves? At least keeping up with the local Joneses?

Q: The Korean War must have been quite an issue that you had to deal with in your time.

BISBEE: No, the Korean War was not the issue that I had to deal with. What I had to deal with was arms aid to Pakistan. The Chinese propaganda was vicious. I had to fix that. So did our people who came out to make speeches. They had to face some very vicious diatribes.

Q: Were there lots of demonstrations against you?

BISBEE: No, believe it or not, I did not have demonstrations against me. There were demonstrations all around me, but none directly against me.

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Q: How was Chinese influence projected in your area?

BISBEE: Through their publications, all kinds of publications. If you want to pursue it further, you could say that throughout the bazaar, the kiosks and through people showing their various Chinese publications. But, there were no demonstrations, per se.

Let me change it a bit. There were such things as Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai, that is, Chinese-India brothers. There was that kind of demonstration, but there was nothing jointly of that nature demonstrated against us Americans.

As a matter of fact, I went out of my way to try to make sure that we did not in some fashion do something that would emulate or in some fashion annoy the local Communist Party. The problem with a lot of this is that many of our people will feel that it is essential to counter the demonstrations and the effects of, they think, the local Communist Party movements. There was no need for that, because most of it was hollow. I did not find it necessary to try to counter that. My counter was to present a good American face.

Q: Did you get much direction from the Voice of America?

BISBEE: No sir.

Q: Did they just let you do your thing?

BISBEE: No, the Voice of America never gave me any direction.

Q: For a while you were working with the Voice of America, weren't you?

BISBEE: For a while there, we were operating closely with the Voice of America, with the directions, as it were. But it was always implied directions. There was never any saying, "You will do so-and-so."

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Or it would simply be, today the news will be that the Chinese have taken over the Tibetan government. The news would come through Bombay.

Q: Were the Soviets and the Chinese, from your observation, playing the same line in India? Or were they doing different things?

BISBEE: The Soviets were playing their own distinctive line, not a Chinese line. The Chinese were playing their own line. The Russians, in my opinion, were concerned that the Chinese would take matters into their own hands. I was being attacked by the Russians on Radio Moscow as a spy for the Americans in the Northwest Frontier. The Russians were concerned about the possibility to some degree that the Chinese would take that into their own hands on the border.

Q: The border, of course, was a prime focus in Chinese-Indian relations, wasn't it?

BISBEE: Not quite at that time, but it was becoming so. It became so in about 1954.

Q: As a practical point of view, did the United States have much interest in India.

BISBEE: The United States had a considerable interest in India, but they didn't know what they would be able to do with it. How would they be able to protect it? They wouldn't want it to go communist. At the same time, how much largesse were they able to produce?

Q: At that time and for decades, India was not much of a market because of Indian mercantile policies that didn't allow much trade.

BISBEE: What was a concern was who was going to control the trade in Southeast Asia? That was of concern. And it later proved to be the case. The Chinese have attempted, and Mao himself in several of his speeches pointed out their interest in controlling the trade of Southeast Asia, and spilling over into Africa.

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Q: Was the atmosphere of the Foreign Service beginning to feel McCarthyism? Was that striking around you?

BISBEE: No, I never felt it.

Q: No people you knew?

BISBEE: No.

Q: India was sort of out of the line of sight. It was more Europe and China, I guess.

BISBEE: McCarthyism was a matter of Europe and China. This is where you began to have the problems with respect to the opening up of China, which was important to the United States at the time.

Q: We didn't really open up relations until the 1970s, but when you and your colleagues, particularly the junior officers, were talking about it, was there a feeling of gee, we should really open up to China?

BISBEE: No, not where I was, but I knew that was going on. Of course, that was where it came to pass - who was the fellow who went off to the island? What was his name? They had to decide.

Q: Do you mean Chiang Kai-shek going to Taiwan?

BISBEE: Thank you. Yes. There was a big decision that had to be made about opening up various parts of China.

Q: It was a very difficult time.

Did you leave there in 1953?

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BISBEE: No, I left Lucknow in 1956.

Q: It was a fairly long tour there.

BISBEE: It was a hell of a long tour there.

Q: How did you feel about relations with the embassy?

BISBEE: I felt as though the embassy could have done more. I did not think in terms of what they were doing for me. I was thinking in terms of how we were being able to do for our own policy in the country. As far as I was concerned, I was satisfied with what was happening in Lucknow. I had no issues there. I had all the support I could possibly have. They were sending me people to give speeches and do all kinds of things. I was asked to do give talks, really great speeches. I was asked to translate for the Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson. I was extremely busy.

Q: Did Eisenhower make a visit to India while you were there?

BISBEE: Yes he did.

Q: How did that go?

BISBEE: I don't like to speak about Eisenhower in terms of India, because I was in Lahore at the time. As far as my information was concerned, he did very well. The Indians liked him, particularly the Indian intelligence services. That's was they told me. Good for him.

Q: Did you have good contacts with the intelligence service?

BISBEE: Yes I did. I had to continue to dissuade them however that I was not an intelligence officer.

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Q: I understand that. We look at it today and there is a real problem in the neighbor, Pakistan, with their intelligence service. It seems to be playing a two-sided game of who they are supporting.

BISBEE: I understand.

Q: How stood the intelligence service that you could observe the intelligence service during this time? Were they political? Were they professional? Or what?

BISBEE: Excuse me, but the language you used is slightly doubled.

Q: Let's talk about the Indian intelligence service.

BISBEE: The Indian intelligence service is highly trained, and highly Western. You also have to understand it has highly religious aspects in it. Taking those things into consideration, you also have to realize that it also has in it elements of local prejudices. This is where it takes very careful analysis to work out what is essential in their needs. I find it difficult to sit here and respond to your question, because I know there are going to be six different responses, or more, to what you are asking. Yet I understand what you are saying to me. Where is the loyalty? Where is the focal point? Where is the direction that is essential that you can depend upon? This is very difficult.

Q: We are talking about the early 1950s.

BISBEE: When you go back to the 1950s, you had the opportunity, particularly with Ayoub who wanted to have a joint intelligence service.

Q: Do you mean the Prime Minister of Pakistan?

BISBEE: Yes. It fell apart as a result of both Krishna Menon and the problems with the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). So you had those issues.

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Q: Pakistan was in SEATO and India was not.

BISBEE: That is correct.

Q: Was Kashmir a major issue while you were there?

BISBEE: Let me point this out to you. Kashmir must be treated as an internal issue of India and Pakistan. It must not be given the slightest hint of it being treated separately as a matter of concern to the international community. If that ever happens, you are going to have a totally different kettle of fish going on in that area.

If I may go back, I mentioned a country, and Kandahar is what I wanted to mention there. That area through Kandahar in Afghanistan - but that's a different issue.

Where was I? Kashmir is an issue that is a tribal issue. It is an issue that has to be treated locally. If it is given the slightest hint of being treated as an international affair, it's going to really be a bombshell in the area. I think you are aware of it as a result of the Maharajah, who was a real idiot, deciding to opt for India, when the bulk of the population of Muslim. He was an idiot.

When President Johnson came to Pakistan, he gave a big speech there. He asked me to translate. I think I did a good job, because he never swore at me. He was asked a question from the audience during the question and answer period saying, "When sir, are you going to do something about the Kashmir question? Are we going to have a solution?"

The President put his hand over the mike and said, "Son, have you got an answer for this? Sometimes there are answers from the mouths of babes."

I said, "Yes, I do. You don't say anything sir. You simply say that this is in the hands of your illustrious leaders, who are very capable of taking care of matters of this nature. They are doing a wonderful job to settle the situation."

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It went off okay.

My response to a question of that nature is that is going to settle itself, but it is going to take money and political pressure from within.

Q: Where did you go after you left India?

BISBEE: I wrote to Henderson saying that I have been here long enough. I think you had ideas that I was to go on elsewhere. In the meantime, Lowell Thomas had also written to Henderson and said, "What are you doing for Royal Bisbee?"

I had not written to anybody.

Q: Loy Henderson was in charge of administration in the Department of State, a very powerful figure.

BISBEE: He was. He wrote me back a beautiful letter, as was his wont, and as I expected, saying nothing. He said yes, I must do something. Thank you very much for drawing this matter to my attention. So I found myself in Greece, in Thessaloniki.

Q: When were you in Greece?

BISBEE: I was in Greece from 1956 to 1958.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

BISBEE: George Allen, a nice man, but ineffective.

Q: By this time, the civil war was over. There must have been a lot of consequences of the civil war. Wasn't the country in pretty poor shape?

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BISBEE: The country was in poor shape, but there was nothing particular in Northern Greece that was of any influence. If there were any problems or matters of any consequence, it was all down around Athens, in the Peloponnesus.

Q: Was there much traffic going up to Yugoslavia at the time?

BISBEE: Only as a matter of personal trade. There was nothing significant, and certainly nothing from the American side.

Q: What were your main responsibilities in Thessaloniki?

BISBEE: Public Relations was the main aspect of it and taking embassy personnel to the great metropolitan... [Mr. Bisbee was searching for a word or place, but I don't think he came up with it.] whenever they wanted. Thessaloniki is on the three fingers of Greece. Up there, you have the monastery, one of the greatest monasteries still in existence. Very little has been said, but the monastery has probably been most helpful in the exchange of information between the monasteries of the Soviet Union and the one that is located there. I took a number of embassy people there.

Q: I went on a church trip through the monasteries. We stayed at various monasteries.

BISBEE: I think I got my first dysentery there. I thought I was dying.

Q: I remember going to one monastery. It was late when we got in. We banged the big door knocker and it opened up. There was a little man with his conical hat and a beard, holding a lantern with a candle in it, saying, "Are any of you guys from Chicago?"

When he found out I was the consul general, I had to talk about social security checks.

BISBEE: You would be very welcome.

Q: What were the political movements in Thessaloniki?

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BISBEE: There were no political movements there, per se. The only real political movement was that of the king and Karamanlis. I don't like to say that there were no political movements, because there are always some political movements. The only other political movement was focused on the newspaper, The Macedonia, a son of a gun that I never trusted.

Q: Was there much tourism at that time?

BISBEE: Tourism was limited. The main focus during the time I was there was the big fair hosted by the Soviets.

MRS. BISBEE: The international fair? It wasn't hosted by the Soviets.

BISBEE: It was as far as we were concerned.

It was hosted and given a great deal of fanfare by the Soviets. One of the things they focused on was fishery material. The aspect that they thought was great was... What was the fish Barb? The name of the fish was spelled incorrectly. It was a carp. It came out on their displays as crap. We were very pleased.

Q: How about relations with Turkey at the time? I guess the Third Greek Army sits up at the border.

BISBEE: There was no particular problem there at all. It was tranquil. That's the best that I can describe it.

MRS. BISBEE: The Cyprus issue was big.

Q: Was this a fairly quiet period when you were there?

BISBEE: For me, it was a quiet period. We had good friends. I had CIA friends and we became very close over time. As a matter of fact, we were assigned similar assignments in

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Karachi later. Both of them are now dead. He called me up when I was in Lahore and said, "Are you coming to Karachi?"

I said, "No, I'm not coming to Karachi."

He said, "Oh yes you are."

I said, "Do you want to tell me why?"

He said, "No."

So I went and I was translating for President Eisenhower.

Q: While you were in Thessaloniki, did the issue of nuclear weapons come up? Some were stored up in that area.

BISBEE: No, never. Only strawberries.

Q: Did Bulgaria loom at all?

BISBEE: No, Bulgaria never loomed at all. The roadways are bad.

Q: I guess the main highway, the autoroute, hadn't been put through then.

BISBEE: Not at that time. What there was was pretty rotten.

Q: I remember in the early 1960s going down to Skopje, we carried gas with us.

BISBEE: That's correct. You were never quite sure you were going to make it or not.

Q: Did you have any relations with the Greek Army at all?

BISBEE: None whatsoever. If I wanted to go some place, it was a telephone call, and I would go. For instance, I would visit the old capital of Alexander, Pella.

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MRS. BISBEE: It was discovered while we were there.

Q: When did you go to Karachi?

BISBEE: We went to Karachi in 1957, I think.

Q: How long were you in Karachi?

BISBEE: I was never in Karachi. I passed through on my way to Lahore.

MRS. BISBEE: He wasn't stationed in Karachi.

BISBEE: I was due for an assignment back in Washington, to head up the Voice of America programs for the Middle East. Suddenly, I received a call from Washington. Loomis was the man in charge of Voice of America at the time. He said, "Roy, we want you back here."

I said, "What am I going to be doing back there?"

He told me. Then about a week later, I received a call saying, "Roy, your assignment back to Washington is cancelled. All of your effects are being transferred to Pakistan."

I said, "What am I going to be doing in Pakistan?"

They said, "We'll send you information by classified communications."

It seems that the individual who had been assigned to the job - I can't remember the name - shot himself. He was a one armed individual. He inadvertently, somehow, shot himself. His brains were all over the ceiling.

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The Consul General was Andrew Cory. They gave him a list of a couple of people. I was on the list. He picked me, having known me in New Delhi. He said, "I want him, and I want no one else."

So I was diverted and sent to Lahore. There I was for the next two years.

Q: What was the position of Lahore at the time?

BISBEE: Lahore was more or less the social capital of the country. Karachi was considered to be the political capital. Karachi was a non-entity as it were. Most of the decisions were made in Lahore.

Q: Rawalpindi, I don't even know if it existed.

BISBEE: It was not even in the minds of anyone. Rawalpindi was a military backwater. It was a useful backwater for keeping track of the military, but there was no foundation of any kind.

Q: Were you there for two years? Until when?

BISBEE: We were there until 1961.

Q: What was the situation there? What were American interests in Pakistan?

BISBEE: American interests in Pakistan were practically zilch at the time. People were running around pushing atoms for peace, and various things of that nature. I was trying to keep track of Bhutto. That man was slippery.

Q: Bhutto was the Prime Minister.

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BISBEE: I put him on various stages for this and that. I kept track of him and invited him to cocktail parties. There was very little you could keep track of him with. He was just a weak man. There was no point in putting any strength behind him.

Q: One of the things that has been a constant motif in Pakistan is the corruption. The Bhutto family has certainly been involved. How did you find the corruption factor there at that time?

BISBEE: In Pakistan there is always corruption because it is tribal. As long as you have tribal elements throughout the area, you are going to have corruption. There is no way to avoid it, all the way from Karachi up through the area. There is no way around it.

Q: Basically, the corruption is a distribution of wealth, according to influence. The tribal leader passed out money to various people in his tribe.

BISBEE: Yes, that is basically it. And we don't seem to get it.

Q: When we look at something like the situation in Pakistan, corruption is a distribution system in the tribal thing. In the West, it's an individual gaining wealth and putting it in bank accounts.

BISBEE: I would buy that.

There are various ways of doing that. There are systems involved in Pakistan that you are not going to find in other areas of South Asia. There is a system called hawayi, sending money. There are other names. If I was on my own, an Indian, and I wanted to send money to the United States, and I were a nasty man, I wouldn't use an American bank account. Why would I do that? I would use the hawayi system.

Q: It's still in a lot of places, like Korea.

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BISBEE: Absolutely.

Q: It's become very much involved with the terrorism factor of today.

BISBEE: Of course. The same thing with relation to Kandahar and that particular part of the world. What I am thinking about is that we are going to be not sufficiently strong in our own political focus, in controlling that whole central aspect of Afghanistan. It is very important that we cannot forget the emphasis that the Islamists are giving to the pursuance of their creed, and the importance of that particular geographic area. That's a very important area to them.

Q: Were we concerned about radical Islam in the area where you were?

BISBEE: Cory was, the Consul General in Lahore. He was a very shrewd man. I had the highest respect for him. He later became ambassador.

Q: You were talking about conservative Islam. I was in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, in the middle of the Wahhabis from 1958 to 1960.

BISBEE: Good for you.

Q: It was the water we drank and the air we breathed.

BISBEE: I hope you kept one.

Q: I think this is probably a good place to stop for this session.

You left there in 1961. Where did you go?

MRS. BISBEE: Washington.

Q: It was about time you went back.

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MRS. BISBEE: Our only Washington assignment.

BISBEE: My only Washington tour.

Q: What were you doing?

MRS. BISBEE: Eurasian and South Asian Affairs, then the National War College.

Q: Okay, so we'll pick it up then.

BISBEE: I suggest we pick it up at the National War College.

End of interview